

TOPICS OF THE DAY

ARMISTICE DAY: THE RAMSAY MACDONALD TOUR: EMPIRE AND
WORLD OUTLOOK: A DRIFT TO INCOMPETENCE: THE TEXT-
BOOKS IN QUEBEC PROTESTANT SCHOOLS: HARD TIMES AND
HARD THINKING: A GLEAM.

THE *Manchester Guardian* uttered some wise words in commenting on the Armistice Day which has just passed. It said, in part: "The celebration of Armistice Day ought to become an international ceremony linking the civilized world, as the Olympic festival linked the Greek world. . . . There can no longer be any excuse for associating it with the victory of one people over another, or the punishment of the guilty by the innocent. Whatever justification could be found for such a view ten years ago, has long since disappeared. One simple fact puts it out of court. A man or woman who is thirty-five years old to-day was twenty when the war broke out. Nobody could hold a person under twenty responsible for the series of events which produced the crash of 1914. If, therefore, an Englishman thinks all the blame for that calamity falls on Germany, or if a German thinks all the blame falls on England, he has to exempt all persons under thirty-five. In five years he will have to exempt all persons under forty. So rapidly do the flying years turn these questions into impersonal issues. . . . This does not mean that no one statesman or ruler was more responsible than another. It means that for an Englishman to think of a German, or for a German to think of an Englishman, as a person who has done him an injury, is as reasonable as it would be for an Englishman to think of a Frenchman as Pitt thought of Napoleon."

Nullus dolor est quem non longinquitas temporis minuat ac molliat.

The change that has come over our Canadian celebration of this event is one of the pleasing features. For some years, as was doubtless inevitable, a good many speakers and a good many newspapers took occasion to "fight the war all over again". It was often noticed that those who had distinguished themselves most in the war seemed not to share in this rancour. But a general change of attitude has come about, and this year it was undoubtedly confirmed by the visit of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. It has been noticed by all that among the most cordial words of welcome and Godspeed addressed to Mr. MacDonald on his tour were those addressed him by an association of veterans. More recently Sir

Arthur Currie has written that "Very little ill-will against Germany lingers in Canada." The tone of the Canadian press (and here let me, who so often criticize it, give the credit due) was of the same excellent tenor on Armistice Day. On the occasion of Mr. MacDonald's visit also, no Canadian journal seems to have disgraced itself by the cheap and ill-considered sniping displayed in a section of the American press.

The British premier's public utterances among us brought home to me a thing which has more than once struck me, in listening to the frank and half-informal discussions to which British visitors of note sometimes treat us—a thing which is not often emphasized in the usual summings up of our imperial relations—the quickening that Canadians receive from our joint discussions with British men of affairs on European and world politics. *We are a part of it.* In a certain very real sense, Britishers and Canadians meet in a family group. With the best will in the world Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Hoover cannot meet thus. They are from the outset in a Foreign Office, or diplomatic, atmosphere. But when Mr. MacDonald says, in his purring Scottish accent, that he feels at home among us, we realise that this is not merely sincere, it is the inwardmost truth of the situation.

Now, if anything can save us from provinciality, it is this. Was it not largely its *Weltpolitik* that made the thought, and art and poetry of Periclean Athens so catholic and universal? The whole citizen body of Athens sat in law-courts and assemblies to debate and decide questions which touched the rim of the Mediterranean world. It was a political education, comparable, without any exaggeration, with that of the discussions in Westminster, ever since England became an imperial power. A country may be a very large country, as large as the United States or Canada, and yet be provincial, if it never gazes beyond its own borders. It becomes dialectic in things other than speech. But we are fortunate in this country in that our life throbs partly with a life larger than our own. Consider for a moment, for example, the connection between British and Canadian universities, with all its implications. Some of us are aware of these and other things; but when ambassadors of such human qualities as Mr. Ramsay MacDonald or Mr. Stanley Baldwin visit us, the value of our spiritual affiliations with Britain should be apparent to many.

THE success or failure of a society may be prognosticated in advance if one discovers whether it has, or has not, in its midst, a smaller society of intelligent, imaginative and sane human-

ity. One or two such people are not enough—for one thing, intelligent, imaginative and sane men, when too heavily outnumbered, are not allowed to die in their beds. And it is vain to hope that the majority in a society will be possessed of the qualities. But there must be a sufficient number to secure for themselves intellectual pursuits and exercises. A handful cannot secure any standard of intelligence in the editorials of newspapers, nor dictate even a minimum of efficiency in an educational system, nor make its voice heard, on behalf of art, in theatres, picture galleries, the architecture of public buildings, the planning of towns, and so forth.

Evidence accumulates that in many respects we Canadians continue to rest on a reputation that is a generation out of date. Among tremendous changes all tending to destroy us, mind and soul, we have merely eddied about, accomplishing nothing, and making no provision even for the salvaging of such institutions of merit as we had. One can remember the time when of half a dozen newspapers in Toronto not more than one, perhaps, could be called "yellow". What distinguishes their survivors to-day? And to mediocrity, at least, the drift is general. Of how many English newspapers in Canada can it be said that they consistently address themselves to intelligent men and women? Let it not be thought that I am demanding an impossible level of intelligence. We need not gaze abroad for exemplars and comparisons. Let us compare ourselves with our former selves. An examination of the files of several of our Canadian English newspapers, once organs of intelligent opinion, reveals a sad loss of intellectual grip during the last generation. I understand the causes of the decline, and have already set them forth in these pages. But the question is not now how intelligence has been ousted, but rather: what is intelligence doing at this moment to reinstate itself? Newspapers are not the only index to our tendencies. We think of them first because they are before our eyes daily, and because the complaint we are making can be made against them pretty generally.

In some places among us, however, the "Cult of Incompetence" has gone so far as to blunt the very instruments which alone may be counted upon for the survival of intelligence among the generations to follow. Having made some comparisons of the kind, at one time and another, over a period of many years, I am certain that the trash, inaccuracies and vulgarity of the text-books used in the Protestant schools of Quebec province cannot be matched in text-books used in Britain, France, Switzerland or Germany. Let us look at some of these books. I take first of all the Geography.

(Frye-Atwood Geographical Series: *New Geography*, adapted for Canada. Published by Ginn and Co., Boston.)

On page 64 we read: "The wide plains in both parts of the New World are east of the highest ranges, and send down long rivers to the sea, on the east and on the north". Now this fits the St. Lawrence, the Mackenzie and the Amazon (though a child might be puzzled as to whether the mouths of the Amazon should be described as on the north or the east of South America). But is not the Ohio, which is navigable for over a thousand miles, a long river? Its general course is west. And what of the Mississippi, which flows south, as do the great tributaries of the Plate? Is New Orleans to be described as on the east of North America?

On the opposite page we read: "In the New World we found the highest mountains lying north and south. In Asia and Europe they lie east and west. The highest mountains in the world are in Asia. On the slope east from them to the sea lives one-fifth of all the people in the world. They are the Chinese. You have perhaps seen some of them. South of these mountains live almost as many more people, in India, which the ships of da Gama reached. We have read of the Alps in Europe. Many of the leading nations of the world live between these mountains and the border seas".

Now, suppose each of the statements here made were true—several of them are false, or at least very inexact—what a jumble of ideas! What is aimed at in this sort of instruction? Is it to be inferred that the height of mountains has something to do with the density of population east and south of them, or with the importance of nations living around them? Why travel all about the Himalayas without naming them, especially after telling us that they are the highest mountains in the world? Are we to be alarmed at the slippery existence of one-fifth of all the people in the world—who live "on a slope" between the highest of all mountains and the sea? Imagine a child exploring a map of Europe to find out just what "leading nations of the world live between the Alps and the bordering seas"! Is there a single nation in Europe that can be thus described?

On page 53 of the same book we are given, quite surprisingly, a little homily on "Laws and Who Make Them". It is all the merest drivel, and includes this jewel of ineptitude: "The fireman is told by laws when he may cut down a door, break windows, and turn water into a house".

On page 80 we read that "Without the horse or the mule the work on a small farm would be very much harder than it is now. . . . The ox is not much used in this country". Now, as most people

know, a good many oxen are used in Nova Scotia and Quebec, compared with the total number of mules to be found in all Canada. We are reminded in this and in other passages that the book is published in the United States. On the same page we read that "Most of the sheep in our country graze in great flocks. A single flock may have many thousands".

In general it may be said that the book is excellent pabulum for the feebler sort of service club. It is cheaply illustrated, but the illustrations are not so cheap as the language and thought. But aside from these things, the book is not a geography at all, in any modern sense of the word. Canadian educators used to travel to Britain and European countries to find out what was being done. In these countries geography, as we are teaching it in Quebec, has been obsolete for many years.

One of the history text-books used in Quebec province is by Emily P. Weaver, and published by Copp, Clark, Toronto. I think that it is perhaps a slight improvement on Canadian History text-books that have been used in parts of Canada in the past; but it is still a wretched book. The order of the narrative is chaotic, The first part of the book suggests that the authoress has consulted many authorities and copied down many gobbets of undigested material, with attention to nothing but something of a chronological sequence. At the end of the book, where she has no guides, she shows not only great inability as an historian, but a complete lack of mind. Her chapter on "SOCIAL CONDITIONS, 1867-1919" is proof that she does not know the meaning of the term. (To take a mild example, what has the flight of Hawker and Grieve to do with the social conditions of Canada?) The chapter contains a bit of high tariff propaganda, and other indiscretions. This book was revised some years ago, so as to include the War; but both in its old and its new forms, teachers, pupils and parents have groaned over it for years, and made bitter complaints about it; yet still the book goes on.

Some of the school Readers and texts on English Literature are the very dregs of vulgarity. The "poetry", of which the children are compelled to memorize pages and pages, is of the order of Salvation Army hymns. The first specimen that catches my eye is:

In each duty
Lies a beauty
If your eyes you do not shut,
Just as surely
And securely
As the kernel in the nut.

Helen Hunt Jackson, Phillips Brooks, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and other such purveyors of doubly distilled vacuities bulk largely in these books. Perhaps the most flagrant nonentities are attributed to our old friends "Anon" and "Selected".

But why go on? It is a burden to the spirit to contemplate almost any aspect of the Quebec Protestant schools,—the more so when one comes upon an enlightened official or teacher, struggling to build his bit of road in the Grand Morass. Educated parents try to undo the mischief their children receive at school, or, if they have means, send them to private schools, or give them private tutors. But even if one saves one's children from the contamination for a few years, later in life the children encounter the results of the general inculcation of the base and banal. The tone of universities, of public music, of journalism, of the theatre and politics, is set by the increasingly heavy mediocrity of the mass.

Yet it would seem not superhumanly difficult to begin a reform in some of the things most obviously in need of reform. I know, as well as any, some of the difficulties in the way of a *general* reform: the corruption of politicians by some very rich men, who move heaven and earth to escape paying school taxes; the fact that in education, as in everything else, like begets like, and ignorance becomes a vested interest; and so on. I realise, too, that if the schools were never so good, they would still have to overcome the degrading influences of American "movies", and American "talkies"; and that now the American and Canadian radio has been largely captured by the barkers and hawkers who have things to sell, and who seem determined to exploit the baser interests of the human mind for their own selfish purposes. But are we to give up altogether? In plain, sober language, are we compelled to admit that the cause of civilization is lost in English-speaking Canada?

There is one comforting thing to remember: the most disastrous changes that have come over us were not deliberate on the part of any one concerned. We often hear such expressions as "the powers of darkness", "the forces of the devil"; but I do not believe that there has been any great conspiracy about it all. To test this, by addressing ourselves to the question immediately before us: what powers of darkness would combine to resist the perfectly reasonable plea that the choice of text-books to be used in our elementary and secondary schools be left to a few educated men and women, instead of to committees wholly unsuited to deal with such matters? But the plea must be made, and the plea must be reinforced, as I said at the beginning, by more than a handful.

The making of text-books, and the selection of text-books after they are made, are not things which can be left to Tom, Dick and Harry. How is one to edit poetry—even English poetry, for English readers? Let our educational authorities read Sir Edward Cook's essay on the *Art of Editing* before they pronounce such a task easy. Then again, how is one to make such things fool-proof for the legions of teachers who are to handle them? Again, the selecting committees who passed the text-books I have named, whoever they may have been, had doubtless a choice between evils in certain cases: most probably this was so in the case of a Canadian History. I am not overlooking the difficulties. My point here is that the difficulties must be overcome, and without delay. As it is, our light is as darkness.

Matthew Arnold, with his elaborate sarcasms on mid-Victorian middle classes, and Swinburne, with his unrivalled facility in cursing stupidity (as he saw it at the moment, of course!) have gone to their rest; and I suppose we are a little better for both of them. Certainly it is to be hoped that neither sarcasm nor the gift for trenchant utterance will perish among us. But I suggest that our intelligentsia, if we have one, first consider how to preserve for itself a keen-cutting edge. The newspapers and the commercial theatres are lost to us. We are beginning to be told on all sides that the universities should concern themselves with "research", and the most recent subject of research recommended is *efficiency in public laundries!* This is what "university leadership" has become, at least in the minds of some of the more vociferous of university men.

Many people in this country are concerned, it would seem, to produce a "Canadian type". Now, the producing of a type is not a difficult thing. Rather it is the hardest thing in the world to escape making types of one sort or another. Imitation, as was said long ago, is one of the most fundamental things in Man. This goes further than fashions in clothes and fashions in speech, important as both of these things are. It is notorious that a school with character imparts a "stamp" to hundreds of boys, and continues to do so, while the character of the school remains unchanged. The influence of a great judge, both on his colleagues and on barristers, has often been remarked. Newman once published a sermon entitled "Personal Influence the Means of Propagating the Truth". Bagehot's comment on this was that, whatever we may think of Newman's "Truth", the success of his own career is the best evidence for his thesis: namely, that men are influenced by style, character,—by the general features of an argu-

ment and its statement, rather than by the essential nature of the argument itself; that, to put it briefly, a determined and intelligent effort on the part of an intelligent individual, even, will create a type.

My suggestion, therefore, would be that, instead of lamenting or denouncing particular examples of bad taste, our intelligentsia should focus its efforts on the most imitative part of humanity, that is, our young children; and, having made sure of its elementary schools, proceed thence upward. I cannot see that the difficulties are insuperable. I hear on all sides: "But our English-speaking population in Quebec is so small". So much the better, say I; so much the easier to make a beginning.

ECONOMIC "crises" are too exclusively an interesting subject of study for the economists. I once heard of a doctor in London who lamented the pulling down of a certain slum: "We got some of our most interesting cases there", he complained. But it is to be hoped that sooner or later these "crises" will be seen as they are, in terms of human beings. "Unemployment" for the compiler of statistics is a word; but to the unemployed and their dependents it is slow starvation, unresisted disease, mental anguish, moral deterioration. Men's hearts being, as a rule, much better than their heads, it is from a consideration of these painful facts, perhaps, that we can expect a more general examination than is now being made in this country into the character of our citizenship. An examination of this kind is long overdue. Canada was for so long a country that meant a livelihood, if one could only reach it, that many of us have failed to observe the great change that has come about. The economist understands the whole matter. For him the change can be analysed, in part, with certain formulae; of other parts he can at least say: "Formula not applicable". But these formulae can be understood only by those who have had a training in mathematics and other things, and most of us have not had that. The situation has not yet become so bad for the majority that they are willing to undergo the pain of mathematical study, it may be. At any rate, the economists and the politicians and the others who contribute to making certain features in our society are a long way from putting their heads together.

This is not to censure the economist as such, nor the politician as such. But it is, of course, equivalent to saying that intelligence has not yet made itself felt in the management of our social life,—or shall we say, our life? One can imagine two economists talking

together over a charge that they had not fore-warned the politicians of certain tendencies:

Economist A.—“What these foolish politicians don't understand is the difference between dynamical and statical solutions, as old Marshall calls them”.

Economist B.—“Yes, and besides that, they are trying to use the same yardstick on agriculture and commerce!”

Economist A.—“By ‘agriculture’ you mean agriculture for consumption, when you distinguish it thus from trade?”

Economist B.—“Certainly.”

Economist A.—“Oh, but come now, isn't agriculture in our modern system subject to the same laws of distribution and exchange as commerce?”

Economist B.—“Well, at least you will have to except the Quebec *habitants*, for one thing.”

Economist A.—“But only in the remote parts: they don't matter much.”

Economist B.—“In addition you will have to except most of the agriculture in the Maritime Provinces; and you will have to except all those large areas in the West, taken up by Russians and many others, who live unto themselves.”

Economist A.—“Yes, I agree, the exceptions do bulk, after all. But I have been thinking, as we talked, that there is another thing, overlooked by the politicians, that is more important than anything yet mentioned.”

Economist B.—“True, it has just struck me also: the instability of everything?”

Economist A.—“Of course! How can we ever make any analysis! Before the ink is dry on it, something else chops in. The curve of immigration goes up; or, there's a slump in the States and emigration goes down. We just get the B. C. salmon industry worked out, and the power men come along and destroy the salmon rivers.”

etc. etc.

The politicians among themselves might complain that the economists were for ever making graphs, and talking abstractly. “As for the change from agriculture to industry, we understand that. But what difference does it make, whether a man works in a factory, or on a farm! He'll get a living either way, or raise

the devil until he does. Besides, the economists themselves talk too much about money values. If they travelled away from the frontiers, as some of us do, in election time, they'd know that farmers and fishermen never see money. And we've got to think about these farmers: they're such infernal grumblers."

The rub will come when the politicians begin to have anxieties on account of the urban proletariat.

These are very complicated questions. Suppose, for example, that we had with the utmost political wisdom, and aided by the greatest good fortune, seen to the welfare of every single person living in Canada at this moment: the very fact that we had done so would bring, with the existing facilities of ingress, unprecedented numbers of immigrants to our shores; and our work would be undone, and our good fortune at an end.

We are not likely, as I have said, to begin at all these vast problems with intelligence. But if human suffering can touch us, sufficiently to make us realise the danger of our reckless instability, some good may come even of the miseries which are to be seen in the appalling slums of Montreal.

I SEE that I have written much about "intelligence", "civilization", and so forth, in an abstract way, and without much reference to concrete examples of the thing desiderated. The postman comes to aid with the December issue of the *Canadian Forum*. I will not go so far as to bless it from cover to cover, for I have not read it all, and doubtless shall not. But I have read enough to say: "Here is good writing! Here is thinking! Here is critical comment on our public affairs that politicians will do well to ponder! And, not least, here is Humour!" I have no idea who Geoffrey Riddehough may be, man or woman. But there is a delicacy in his satire, "The Story of a Five-Dollar Bill", which I very much commend. Caricature, and the humour of exaggeration, are easily done; and they abound on this continent. But if only our Canadian writers could remember the line in Hesiod:

"Witless ones, who know not that the half is greater than the whole."

I hope Geoffrey Riddehough is young. I feel already towards him as the dominie feels towards the new boy who has just displayed signs of greatness.

C. S.